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ABSTRACT

This study examined the academic and social integration of black students, all of whom were recipients of scholarships in a science and math scholarship program for black students at the University of Maryland (Baltimore County). The Meyerhoff program provides a range of support in addition to the scholarship support including study groups and personal and academic advising. This study compared 15 Meyerhoff scholars and 15 non-Meyerhoff white students with similar academic credentials. Qualitative data were collected from interviews (sophomore and senior years) with the Meyerhoff students and were organized around the six principles in Tinto's theory of student persistence. Results pointed to a theme of black achiever isolation. Academically talented black students entered college with few, if any, academic relationships with other achieving black students. Meeting and studying with other talented black students was highly valued by the Meyerhoff participants. The study's conclusions also underscored the importance of strong relationships between faculty and students even when those faculty are predominantly white. The study's overall conclusion is that being in a "race-specific" program at a predominantly white institution contributed to the success of the students. The senior year interview form is appended. (Contains 47 references.) (DB)

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DRAFT PAPER

Voices of Gifted Black Students

Paper Presented at the
Association for the Study of Higher Education
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This paper was presented at the annual meeting of the Association for the Study of Higher Education held at the Marriott Hotel, Orlando, Florida, November 2-5, 1995. This paper was reviewed by ASHE and was judged to be of high quality and of interest to others concerned with the research of higher education. It has therefore been selected to be included in the ERIC collection of ASHE conference papers.

Introduction

Academic achievement is a regularly researched topic in education. A significant portion of the research has focused on underachievement, particularly the underachievement of black students. One might surmise from reading the literature that the operating assumption is to study struggling black students. Research on high ability or gifted and talented black students has been largely neglected (Cooley, Cornell & Lee, 1991; Ford & Harris, 1990; Kitano, 1991). In a review of the literature from 1924, Ford and Harris (1990) reported that "of 4,109 articles found on the gifted and talented, less than two percent (75) addressed minority group members. The percentage would be even lower if one counted only those articles about gifted and talented black students."

Most of the research that is available on gifted and talented blacks focus on students who are in precollege environments (elementary, junior high and high school). This research addresses issues of identifying high ability blacks (Baldwin, 1985; Harty, Adkins & Sherwood, 1984; Maker & Schiever, 1989) to defining and assessing giftedness in ways that are culturally sensitive and responsive (Baldwin, 1987; Passow, 1986; Yancey, 1983). Although less frequent, research is beginning to emerge in the area of understanding the social and emotional adjustment of high ability blacks (Cooley, Cornell and Lee, 1991). However, college students are more likely to be considered in studies of adult giftedness. Like giftedness in general, there is little information on adult giftedness (especially black adults) which focuses on their psychological adjustment (Rocamora, 1992). The literature available on adult giftedness points to a wide range of characteristics and issues facing gifted adults. Roeper (1991), after years of working with gifted adults identified a number of characteristics including gifted adults are not necessarily popular and prefer to interact with people who share their interests, they tend to have amazing verbal ability and love to engage in intense intellectual discussions, they often develop their own methods of learning and grasping concepts, they are often driven by their giftedness and may be overwhelmed by their creativity. Gifted adults struggle with issues of career development (Kerr & Claiborn, 1991; Noble, 1989) and social and psychological adjustment (Noble, 1989; Roeper, 1991). These themes may or may not encompass the experiences of black and other minority gifted adults. It could very well be that issues associated with giftedness transcends race however, studies that have focused on gifted black populations suggest race makes a difference.

Identification of gifted black students early in the educational pipeline is critical. However, it is also imperative that researchers understand how these students fare at higher levels of education. As colleges and universities struggle to retain black students on predominately white campuses (especially those who enter with high GPA and SAT scores) it is critical that they understand the experiences of these students. The paucity of research on gifted black students in general, and the almost nonexistent research on gifted black college students, demonstrates a profound need to understand the range of issues affecting the academic and social needs of this untapped resource.

This study seeks to add to the scant research on high ability black college students' academic and social integration. The findings of this paper represent the qualitative data from a study designed to test Tinto's (1975, 1987, 1993) theory of academic and social integration.

Tinto's theory is not designed to test issues of race, however questions were added in the present study to the senior interview protocol to learn about students racial experiences with other students and faculty. The subjects of this study represent a distinctive population of merit-based scholarship recipients described later in this paper. The extensive interviews with the students confirm some of the findings in the literature on the importance of peer group connections in retaining students (Fleming, 1985; Heath 1992; West and Teja, 1988) faculty interactions (Pascarella & Terenzini 1979) group cohesiveness and social bonding for blacks (Arkbar, 1979; Boykin, 1978; Fordham, 1988) and self-concept of gifted black students (Cooley, Cornell, & Lee, 1991). The perspectives of these students enrich our understanding of the academic and social experiences of academically talented black college students.

Patterns Emerging from Gifted Black Students

Like other students, gifted black students face socio-emotional adjustment issues, primarily issues of self-concept and acceptance by peers (Baldwin, 1991; Roeper, 1991; 1965; Rubenzer, 1976). For gifted blacks, the issues of self-concept are different from those of other blacks and gifted white students (Exum & Colangelo, 1979). Gifted black students have the challenge of integrating into their self-concept their racial identification and what it means to have been identified as "gifted" (Cooley, Cornell & Lee, 1991). Oftentimes these students are challenged by their black peers as "acting white" (George, 1986) or not being black enough as if "gifted black" were an oxymoron.

The issue of race and balancing black pride is critical for all gifted adolescents especially black youth (Baldwin, 1991). The role of the peer group is, "one of the more worrisome phenomena in selecting and placing gifted adolescents (especially males) in programs for the gifted is the negative attitude shown by peers not selected for the programs and the subsequent isolation felt by those selected (Baldwin, 1991)." Lindstrong & Von Sant (1986) suggests that it may be difficult for black students to integrate their racial identity and their giftedness because of the perceived conflict of having a minority status and high academic achievement which is usually associated with majority culture (Cooley, Cornell & Lee, 1991). Essentially, gifted black students may have a difficult time seeing themselves as both black and gifted. Cooley, Cornell & Lee (1991) assert that, "placement in a predominately white gifted program could compound this problem if it strengthens the black student's perception that there is an intrinsic association between giftedness and majority race." Although gifted black students are challenged by problems of self-concept and peer acceptance, they tend to have positive self-images (Haynes, Hamilton-Lee, & Comer, 1988).

Retaining Black Students in College

Most of the early research on retention focused on the experiences of white students (Beal and Noel, 1980; Lenning, Beal and Sauer, 1980 Noel, 1978; Astin, 1977; Ponce, 1988). As black student enrollment began to increase at predominantly white institutions, both the students and the institutions found themselves ill-prepared to deal with their arrival (Graham et al, 1984). According to Graham et al (1984), black students on white campuses were adjusting to the living and academic conditions that they found on white campuses, and the institutions were

simultaneously adjusting to the problems and issues of a new student population. The changes that were occurring for the students as well as for the institution, created an expansion in the research on black student adjustment on predominantly white campuses (Graham et al, 1984). As research began to focus on the voices of black students to understand their experience juxtaposed to white students, different patterns began to emerge. In a recent review of the literature, Ponce (1988), found that among the concerns of minority students were feelings of loneliness and isolation, racial/ethnic identity development, racial hostility in the form of harassment, feeling alienated and not belonging. These non-academic variables or social factors begin to tell a story that may account for different needs of black students.

The movement to understand black students' experiences has enriched the research on retention and attrition. Non-cognitive variables such as positive self-concept, realistic self-appraisal, ability to understand and deal with racism, a strong support person, preference for long term goals over short-term and successful leadership and demonstrated community service (Sedlacek & Brooks, 1976) has been related to the success of all students particularly minority students. However, studies about black students can be further enhanced by understanding the rich diversity within the black student population. At the risk of stating the obvious, not all black students are the same, nor do the same psycho-social and environmental factors affect every student equally. Expanding research on black students is important because we need to understand more about the different subsets of black students (Allen, 1985).

The Meyerhoff Scholars

In 1989, The University of Maryland Baltimore County, a predominantly white campus, instituted a competitive scholarship program for academically talented black students interested in mathematics and science. Dr. Freemen Hrabowski, then Executive Vice President of the university, and Director of the Meyerhoff Program, and later President of the university, combined his personal commitment and professional expertise to secure a grant from the Robert and Jane Meyerhoff Foundation to support the development of the scholarship fund. Dr. Hrabowski (a mathematics major) an African-American male was very committed to the establishment of a science and math scholarship program for black students. The grant equaled $52,000 per student. There have been seven classes of Meyerhoffs enrolled in the program. This study examined the class of 1990, the second class of Meyerhoffs and the first to admit female students.

The Meyerhoff program rests on the philosophy that all the students selected for the program can be successful if they are supported with proper resources and opportunities (Hrabowski & Maton, 1995). The support systems are made available through the thirteen different components of the program such as scholarship support, study groups, personal and academic advising. The average SAT score for the first four classes is 1180 with the SAT Math score average of 633. The average high school grade point average is 3.5 on a 4.0 scale. A subsample of 50 males in the Meyerhoff Program reveal that 60%-70% of the males come from middle class backgrounds with two parents in the household.

Methodology

The case study research method was applied in this study to determine the extent to which the retention model developed by Tinto (1975, 1987, 1993) applied to and explained the persistence of 15 Meyerhoff Scholars and 15 Non-Meyerhoffs. The Non-Meyerhoffs are white students who have similar academic credentials to the Meyerhoff Scholars. A comparison group of white students were used because there were not enough blacks on campus unaffiliated with the program available with comparable profiles. Tinto's (1975, 1987, 1993) causal model of dropouts is widely accepted in the literature and forms the theoretical basis for most of the current research in the field. The primary components of Tintos (1975; 1987; 1993) model suggest that dropping out of college is best viewed as a longitudinal process that involves the interaction of the student with the academic and social systems of the college.

The Non-Meyerhoffs were paired to match the Meyerhoffs on pre-college academic indicators in the following priority, gender, SAT math score, high school GPA, and total SAT score. When possible, students were matched on major. Data were collected from the Institutional Integration Scales (IIS) developed by Pascarella & Terenzini (1980) to provide a more precise measure of academic and social integration for the Meyerhoffs and Non-Meyerhoffs. Qualitative data were also collected from the Meyerhoffs to further test the strength of Tinto's model. In his second edition of Leaving College Rethinking the Causes and Cures of Student Attrition, Tinto advocated a broader range of methodologies to enhance understanding of student experiences. He asserted that, "effective assessment of retention also requires the use of a variety of qualitative methods ranging from focus-group interviews to qualitative interview techniques to explore student perceptions of their experiences on campus (p.217)."

The qualitative data were collected from two different interviews (sophomore and senior year interviews) with the Meyerhoffs only and interviews with two of the four staff members associated with the program. For the purposes of this paper, only the qualitative data from the senior year interviews with the Meyerhoff students will be examined because it reflects the experiences of the Meyerhoffs in a "race-specific" program.

Qualitative Data

Qualitative data were collected to test the six principles outlined in Tinto's (1987) theory. Although his work was expanded in 1993 to include other principles of effective retention, each of the six principles in his 1987 work remain as components in the revised model. The six principles served as the theoretical propositions tested in this study. The first sets of interviews were conducted in the sophomore year by a staff member hired by the Meyerhoff Program. The transcribed tapes were made available to this researcher. The sophomore year interviews focused on the transition from the freshman to the sophomore year. Students were asked about their academic and social experiences. The second set of interviews (conducted by the researcher) occurred in the senior year and served as the primary source of qualitative data. The questions for the senior year interview were designed to further test the strength of the theory by ascertaining the students' opinions and perceptions of how well the program established the six principles Tinto (1987) outlined as essential for persistence.

Using the six principles as a guide, interview questions were developed for the senior year to coincide with each principle to determine the student's experience with the Meyerhoff program (See Appendix A). Because this study also assessed the racial experiences of students and how students felt about being in a "race specific" program, a seventh category of "race and the academic experience" was included which added questions on being a black student on a predominately white campus enrolled in a "race specific" program.

The data were analyzed using a checklist matrix which included data gathered from interviews. The checklist matrix included the six principles of the theory (and the seventh category of race and the academic experience) and valid indicators from the senior year interviews. Valid indicators are examples of programs or activities that indicate that the principle in Tinto's theory is in operation. A number of valid indicators were identified in advance as evidence of the enactment of six principles (see Fries-Britt, 1994). The study also allowed for emerging data to be included. All of the students participated in the sophomore year interviews; a total of 12 out of 14 possible students participated in the senior year interviews.

Results

Finding About Peer Interactions

This study affirms the importance of peer interactions in retaining students (Astin, 1977; Tinto, 1975, 1987, 1993; Pascarella & Terenzini, 1991; Fleming, 1984). The relationships the Meyerhoffs established with each other were viewed as important to their motivation to do well academically. Moreover, developing early friendships with each other (and with other students) helped them adjust to the campus.

The majority of the students noted that it was important for them to have other black students in the program. Examples are explored further under the race and academic experience theme). Early in the interviews, it became clear that the majority of Meyerhoffs had very little contact with other gifted and talented black students prior to college. For example, one student commented, "I am not accustomed to being in a program with all achieving black students. I have always been in predominantly white schools. The biggest support is just having other black students." Eight of the twelve students interviewed noted that having access to other bright black students was very important. Another student commented that, "one of the special things about the program is the number of meetings we have to discuss different things. Also the fact that there are a number of other black students studying and concentrating." Other levels of support were mentioned including help from staff in the program and having all expenses paid.

Many of the students were impressed with the first class of Meyerhoffs. They were proud to be in a program with other successful students. One student's comments are characteristic, "I have been encouraged to excel by the other 19 Meyerhoffs in the first class. I think they keep us on our toes."

Several students noted that it was important for them to interact with other students on campus who were not in the Meyerhoff program. Not only were they encouraged by the staff to interact with students outside of the program, but most of the Meyerhoffs sought these friendships on their own. Several of the Meyerhoffs felt that students outside of the program (especially other

black students) often categorized them as a group, referring to them as "nerds" until they got to know them individually. Many of the students indicated that they wanted to maintain their own sense of identity apart and separate from the Meyerhoffs. Although they were proud to be Meyerhoffs, they also wanted to be recognized as individuals.

Finding About Interactions With Faculty

The Meyerhoffs noted very positive interactions and relationships with faculty. Many of the students noted that the faculty often asked them if they were Meyerhoffs (especially when they sat in the front of the class). Some students felt that they were treated specially because they were in the program, and others felt that it did not make a difference. Eleven out of 12 students interviewed had contact with at least one, and in many cases, several faculty members outside of the classroom. The relationships they had with the faculty were obviously beneficial to their academic experiences. Three students gave vivid and spirited examples of the nature of their contact with the faculty. One student stated:

> There is one professor here that I am especially close to. I took an internship with her and it has really turned out to be a great relationship. I respect her as a person and she is a wonderful, modern thinking woman and we talk about, well, of course, research and things. Actually she is a white professor but she can talk freely with me about problems about being a minority in science and being a woman, things like that. We talk about fun things. I've developed a good relationship with her.

Similarly, another remarked, "I have one professor that taught me last semester and now I am doing research with her. We are more friends than professor and student. We can talk. It's not one of those relationships where she is talking down to me or questioning am I smart enough." Yet another student remarked,

> Yes I do. It's more of a friendship, I would say, with one of my TA's, we talk from time to time, sometimes about computer science, sometimes just shooting the breeze about weight lifting, basketball, whatever. Another professor, she taught Spanish, she is very interested in my relationship with my girlfriend, always asking how are we doing, are we doing fine together. My most recent relationship would be with one of my Econ Professors. He is very into sports so I asked him to come to a couple of games. He enjoys them and we talk about the games. When I go see him in his office we sit there and talk. I like the faculty and staff.

Even in those cases in which students started off saying they had no contact or not much contact with faculty, their answers still reflected some level of interaction with faculty. For an example one student stated,

> I don't have that much contact with faculty, just my academic advisor. I don't talk that

often with faculty about non-academic issues. There is one professor who seems interested in what I am doing in English.

Another stated. My contact with faculty is pretty much in class. One of my teachers last semester, my Physics teacher, we have an intramural football team and he plays for that so he's about the only person, the only instructor, I have had any contact with outside of the classroom. Outside of my major, I think my French teacher and I talk outside of class, that's my minor, but that is pretty much it.

Findings About Race and the Academic Experience

Students were asked a number of questions about race to see if being in a "race-specific" program enhanced academic and social integration. Some questions focused on the advantages and disadvantages of being black in a program like the Meyerhoff Program. Students were asked about their experiences with racism on campus and the degree of interactions they had with students of the same and different ethnic background. They were also asked how important they felt a program like the Meyerhoff was.

All of the students noted that there were benefits to being in the Meyerhoff program. The benefits cited most often were: 1) the resources offered in the program such as computer, money, and tutoring; 2) knowing that there are other similar students with whom to connect; and 3) many faculty members are aware that you are a Meyerhoff and this helps. Students also expressed a number of disadvantages with being in the program. One of the primary issues was dealing with students who resented the Meyerhoffs because they were getting better treatment. Four of the Meyerhoffs gave examples of how they were questioned about the merits of the program and even their academic skills. For example, one student commented, "The down side is the people who think the program should be both black and white. They don't think the school should have such a program and they voice it." Similarly, another student stated,

There were disadvantages in the beginning. You were kind of segregated or separated from other African-American students and I think that made it hard for us socially. It also hurt us as far as the Caucasian community is concerned because they felt as though we were almost like on financial aid or something and we didn't earn our right to be here and we were kind of not accepted by anybody. Some black students felt as though we were getting special treatment. Now that there are so many of us they can't just pick us out.

Another disadvantage is that three students felt a little "watched" by the program. In the voice of one student, "You feel a little watched because everyone knows how you are doing." It is also worth noting that three students did not see any disadvantages at all with the program. The group was divided on their personal experiences with racism on campus. At least five members of the group said that they never experienced racism directly; however, a few followed up by saying that they had heard about problems or were aware of others having problems. One student commented,

I don't think outright that I have experienced racism, not personally. I am sure those

activities go on. I've heard all kinds of remarks that have been made to other students about being a female or about being black.

The rest of the group (seven) reported "subtle" forms of racism coming from other students and in a few cases from the faculty about the program and the academic capability of the Meyerhoffs. Another example of subtle racism included racial remarks written on desks in classrooms.

All of the students felt that their experiences at UMBC would have been different without the Meyerhoff Program. Some students had stronger feelings about this than others. Most students noted that the major difference would be in the amount of support they would receive. A number of students mentioned that they would not have as many close relationships with people who are going through the same thing. "I think some of my experiences would have been different without the program. The people in the program are like brothers and sisters, you automatically have somebody else who is going through the same thing." Similarly, a second student noted,

> My experience without the Meyerhoff Program would be totally different, I don't know if I would have the support system that I have now. I wouldn't say totally different. I would just say different. I would still have access to tutors through another program, but I wouldn't have the contact with the administrative staff of the Meyerhoff Program, their advice.

Nine of the students interviewed indicated that race contributed to their motivation to do well. There were various degrees of influence described. Examples include: "I think race does contribute to my motivation to do well. In fact, I am positive that it does. My parents and grandparents always told me that being black you have to be twice as good to go half as far. I want to do well for myself and I want to do well for the women around me." Another student commented,

> Yes, that (race) and my brothers, because they are seven years younger than I am, and they look up to me and so I want to set a good example for them and also an example for blacks in general, so that they can see that somebody can make it and there aren't a lot of Ph.D.'s, which is what I want to do.

When asked about the racial make up of their social peer group and the faculty they interacted with, ten of the students reported that they had close personal relationships with students who were of the same ethnic and racial background, and two reported having relationships with students of other ethnic and racial backgrounds. However, most of the interaction with students from different ethnic and racial backgrounds was for purposes of studying or for organized sports activities. There were a few examples that included general social interaction with other ethnic minorities. However, the emphasis was studying and sports. For example a student commented,

> I don't have too many close relationships. The ones I have here, I can say most of them

are black. I can count them on one hand. I study with students of other ethnic groups, I play basketball with students of other races, I hang out with them, I don't care what race you are. If you are someone, I want to be with I will hang out with you.

With the exception of one student, most of the faculty with whom students interacted were of a different racial background. However, students had contact with black professionals in the field and other black professors outside of math and science.

The students made several observations about being in a "race-specific" program. Eight students expressed that it was more important that their fellow Meyerhoffs be high-achieving students than they be black. Six students stated that it was important that the students in the program were black. For at least half of the group it was important in the beginning that the program targeted black students. The degree of influence this had on students attending the program varied. One student stated, "the fact that the Meyerhoffs where the same ethnic background was a deciding factor in terms of companionship. It was more like bringing ease and comfort to the undergraduate situation." Another student noted,

> It was important to me that the students in the program were black and high achieving blacks. I saw it as people who could not only compete with me but I saw I was going to have some competition in school because if you compete with somebody then you are constantly pushing for the best and I saw it as students who could help me.

In some cases where students initially indicated that it was not important, the subsequent experience with the program suggested that the importance of race might be different now. For example, it was noted that,

> At the beginning of the program, it wasn't important that the students were in the same racial group. Looking back on it now, it would have been a lot different if we were different racial groups. It's easy to do things outside of academics with people of the same ethnic and racial background.

Similarly, another student for whom race initially was not important noted,

> When I first entered the program, it didn't matter that all the students in the program were black, it didn't influence me to come. Right now I look back on it and it's scary, (to think what it would be like in a mixed group) it's a good feeling. I am glad that the students are black in the program now.

Race was not always seen as a necessary factor. In four cases, students simply stated it was unimportant relative to other issues like having access to resources and support. An example of a typical response was, "It didn't make a difference to me that the students would all be black in the program, I was happy to receive money to go to school. I didn't want my parents to have to pay for school."

Discussion

While this study focused on a small and unique population, it lends support to factors identified in the literature as significant for retention in general and important to high ability black students in particular. The extensive interviews with the students affirm the importance of peer and faculty interaction. The relationships that the students established with other Meyerhoffs and the faculty created support mechanisms through which students could comfortably explore the campus and establish academic and social networks. More important, this study adds to the little we know in the field about the experiences of black achievers who often experience difficulty in peer acceptance (Baldwin, 1991; Karnes, 1965; Rubenzer, 1976).

The data and evidence point to a theme of black achiever isolation. The experiences of the Meyerhoffs in this study indicate that academically talented black students enter college with few, and in some cases, no academic relationships with other achieving black students. Even in those cases where the students attended a predominately black high school, they still had less than satisfactory experiences in their interactions and relationship with other achieving blacks. For the students who attended predominately black high schools, they indicated that often the majority of the students in the honors or college accelerated classes were white.

This lack of contact throughout high school with other black students who are academically talented formed an image for students that they are alone, and belonged to a small "minority" of black students who had high academic ability. Subsequent experiences in the Meyerhoff Program, with other black achievers, provided these students with a new awareness and esteem for the intellectual talents of blacks. Meeting and studying with other talented black students established a new expectation and encouraged the students to study harder.

Opportunities should be made available for academically talented students to network as early as possible (junior high and high school) so that they can be introduced to the larger community of talented and gifted blacks. Certainly programs like the Meyerhoff have attended to this need, however the intervention may need to occur sooner. High achievers should be encouraged to study together. This is not to suggest that they avoid studying and working with students of less talent. In fact, it is probably essential that average students work with talented students to increase their own academic capability and motivation to do well. However, working with other gifted students will provide an opportunity for these students to gain from the experiences of working with others who are also academically talented to diminish the negative experience of feeling like the "only bright black student" in their group. Black achievers on white campuses need other levels of support outside of the campus community with professionals (especially black professionals) who can serve as mentors and role models.

A second finding from the data is that there was a strong relationship between the faculty and the students. Researchers have long sense recognized that the interaction of the faculty with students, their attitudes and expectations of students are significant factors in retention (Pascarella, 1980, Astin, 1977, Tinto, 1987, Fleming, 1984, West & Teja, 1988). For black students, particularly those on predominately white campuses, faculty interaction is very important, yet we know from the literature that black students have difficulty making connections with the faculty (Fleming, 1985, Burrell, 1980). Fleming (1984), in an extensive study found that black students experienced anxiety when interacting with the faculty. She also found that intellectual development was stunted for blacks on white campuses and this was directly related to

faculty student interaction. According to Fleming (1994),

> White colleges are not able to encourage growth in the cognitive domain to any substantial degree. The relative absence of cognitive growth is hypothesized to be related to an absence of positive relationships with faculty. These students are relatively unable to develop strong relationships with faculty

The findings of this study demonstrate otherwise. Unlike the experiences of many black students on predominately white campuses, this study revealed that the Meyerhoffs had very effective relationships with the faculty and identified the interaction with the faculty as very positive. For a significant majority of the students, the faculty members with whom they interacted socially and academically were white. This is certainly plausible at a predominately white institution, especially in the fields of math and science. What it helps to illustrate and affirm, however, is that white faculties who are sincere and interested can serve a very constructive and affirmative role in the lives of black students.

Both white faculties and black students bring biases to the academic process which impede their ability to fortify relationships. Eliminating the barriers that keep these two groups apart is critical. Although we don't know from this study what motivated the faculty to be involved with the students, we do know that these types of interventions add tremendously to the academic success of students (Edmonds and McCurdy, 1988, Tinto, 1993). Faculty who work with gifted black students should be included in an orientation program designed to address the academic and social needs of students. It is imperative that faculty understand the critical role they play in the academic success of students.

Finally, the data suggests that being in a "race-specific" program contributed to the success of the students. The cultural and academic environments on predominately white campuses can be alienting to black students. This study found that being in a race-specific program contributed in part to the success of the Meyerhoffs academically and socially. The students in this study were enrolled at a predominately white institution however, they had membership in a community of talented black collegians. The "segregated" community of the Meyerhoff Scholars provided the initial support and foundation from which to explore or "integrate" into the larger university community. The notions of academic and social "integration" explored in Tintos theory may have additional implications as it relates to minority students. It may be important for minority students to find a "like-type" community to assit them in their first level of integration before successfully integrating into the larger university community.

Discussions of race and the academic experience are not new in American higher education. Continuing to understand the impact of race is important. Tinto (1993) in his revised work notes that the experiences of students' of color may be different from majority students (pg. 180-181).

> "As a group, students of color are more likely to come from poorer backgrounds and have experienced inferior education then are white students as a group. But not all students of color are disadvantaged, nor all disadvantaged students those of color. Most disadvantaged students are in fact white (Tinto, 1993)."

The Meyerhoffs represent a different profile from the "majority" of black students in higher education as it pertains to educational achievement and in some cases family background, yet they share the common variable of race with all black students. Understanding their perspectives on race and the academic experience can be beneficial to understanding the experiences of other black students. Like other black students, they have experienced the "subtle" (and not so subtle) forms of racism that occur on predominately white campus. Even with high academic ability, black students continue to need the support that comes from a "like-type" community of other blacks in general and gifted black students in particular.

Campus policies must continue to consider the importance of community support including the support that comes from a "race-specific" program. Programs designed to retain students should consider the establishment of mentor programs and peer counseling programs that bring students in contact with members of their racial group. The negative social connotation of the term "segregation" limits the progress that can be made by creating hospitable climates on college campuses for black students which initially may need to be "segregated" experiences. If black students can find the support within a cultural and community framework that is familiar, it may increase their success in integrating into the larger white campus. The community of black collegians will always reflect a wide range of needs. Some black students, including gifted black students will decline involvement in "race-specific" communities. Often the pressure to "fit-in" on predominately white campuses serves as a barrier for some black students to establishing a support community of other black collegians. However, campus policies and programs should continuue providing opportunities for those who need a "race-specific" experience.

Conclusions

Scholars and practitioners need to know much more about the diverse communities of black students, especially high ability black students. The voices of black students in the educational pipeline, especially in math, science and engineering offer a rare opportunity to understand the experiences of a distinctive group within the community of black students. Ford & Harris (1990) perhaps said it best, "The study of giftedness among blacks is in its infancy and may remain so unless educators and other professionals take a more active role in discovering and encouraging it." The educational community needs to know as much about minority giftedness as is known about minority underachievement if there is hope of dispelling the myth that giftedness is somehow associated primarily with the majority race.

Finally, future research might also seek to understand what motivates the faculty to work closely with students in programs like the Meyerhoffs. It could be that special efforts have taken place to sensitize the faculty to the quality of the students in the program. Perhaps the high visibility and support the program receives from the President of the university (who was the former director and founder of the program) add to the motivation of the faculty. Does a white faculty feel differently about working with high achieving blacks versus average black students and do they feel comfortable in their ability to relate too and work with black students? These and other areas might be included in a study of white faculties working with gifted black students.

Appendix A
Senior Year Interview

Theoretical Propositions and Interview Questions

I. Institutions (Meyerhoff Program) should ensure that new students enter with or have the opportunities to acquire the skills needed for academic success.

1. Did you feel academically prepared to succeed at UMBC? Please explain why or why not.

2. Describe how the Meyerhoff Program has been supportive of your academic needs.

3. Describe how your work habits have changed since your freshman year for example study skills an work expectations of self.

II. Institutions (Meyerhoff Program) should reach out to make personal contact with students beyond the formal domains of the academic life.

4. Do you have any personal contacts with faculty outside of your classes? If yes, describe the type of interactions you have outside of the classroom.

5. How often do you talk with faculty about non-academic issues?

6. Do you have any personal contact with UMBC administrators or Meyerhoff staff members outside of the Meyerhoff Program? If yes, describe the type of interactions you have outside of the program.

7. How often do you talk with UMBC administrators and Meyerhoff staff about non-academic issues outside of the Meyerhoff Program?

8. What has been some of the non-academic activity that you have been involved in at UMBC?

9. How did you learn about these non-academic activities? Are you satisfied with the amount of contact you have had outside of the classroom and outside of the program?

10. What research experiences have you had outside of the classroom and have they been valuable?

III. Institutional (Meyerhoff Program) retention actions should be systematic in character.
These questions were asked of staff members

What happens if a student is not performing well in the program?

Are there systematic mechanisms in place to keep students academically on course? If so, please describe them.

IV. Institutions (Meyerhoff Program) should start as early as possible to retain students.

11. When were you first contacted by the Meyerhoff Program?

12. What was the nature of the contact? (Letter, phone call, visit, interview etc)

13. How many times were you contacted before you decided to attend UMBC?

14. What do you remember most about your contact with the program?

V. The primary commitment of institutions (Meyerhoff Program) should be to their students.

15. Do you feel that the faculty you have encountered are interested in teaching and working with students? What evidence do you have to support your opinion?

16. Has the Meyerhoff Program staff let you know that they are committed to you as a student, if so how have they shown their commitment?

VI. Education, not retention, should be the goal of institutional (Meyerhoff) retention programs.

17. In what ways have you been encouraged to excel academically?

18. How is academic achievement rewarded and recognized by the program?

19. What if anything, has been unique about your educational experience?

20. What are the most special characteristics of the Meyerhoff Program academic support component?

21. How important are the other Meyerhoff Scholars to you?

VII. The Importance of race and the academic experience (an added category to Tinto's (1987) principles)

22. Are there benefits to being a black student in a program like the Meyerhoff program at UMBC?

23. Are there disadvantages of being a black student in a program like the Meyerhoff

scholars program at UMBC?

24. Do you feel you experience at UMBC would be different without the Meyerhoff Program? If so, how and why? If not, why not?

25. Have you experienced racism on campus? If so in what ways?

26. Does race contribute to your motivation to do well in school? What other things contribute to your motivation?

27. Based on your experience, how important would you say programs like the Meyerhoff Program are?

28. Are most of the students with whom you have close personal relationships of a different ethnic and racial background or are they of the same ethnic and racial background?

29. Do you have substansive interaction with students from other ethnic or racial backgrounds? Describe the type of interaction you have.
Are most of the faculty with who you interact of a different ethnic and/or racial background, or are they of the same ethnic and racial background?

30. How important was it to you that all of the students in the Meyerhoff program would be of the same racial group? What difference, if any, did it make in your decision to become a Meyerhoff?

31. How important was it that the students in the meyerhoff program were high achieving Black students.

32. What has it been like to be a black (male/female) in the Meyerhoff Program?

33. Is there anything you would like to tell me about your academic and social experience that I have not asked, or anything about the Meyerhoff Program?

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